

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



[The Editor is not responsible for opinions expressed in this department.]

[LETTERS to the editor must be accompanied by the name in full and address of the writer, otherwise such communications cannot be recognized. The name need not appear in the JOURNAL unless so desired.—ED.]

DEAR EDITOR: Will you allow an ex-army nurse who has over three years of active service to her credit space to say a few words in regard to army nursing in war time in relation to the eligible volunteer list?

The letter from L. L. Hudson, published in the February number of the JOURNAL, seems to me to offer by far the strongest argument in favor of such a list that has yet been presented, although doubtless it was not written with this end in view. To plead the confusion and mismanagement that existed in early war days as an excuse for withholding support to a measure that has for its primary object the prevention of a like condition in future seems rather illogical.

Possibly if the army nurse of '98 could have been drawn from such a list, Miss Hudson's experience might have been quite different.

Unless my memory is at fault the doctor lady received her appointment as chief in place of a nurse who had proved incompetent. At that time Presidio, together with most of the large army hospitals, rejoiced in a miscellaneous collection of women—good, bad and indifferent, and the surgeon in charge, like many of the older army men, knowing little or nothing of the trained nurse, judged all by the unfortunate standard set by a few. Later on he learned to appreciate them at their full value, but alas, he swore to the bitter end!

Miss Hudson and her friend seem to have been peculiarly unfortunate in their experience with army surgeons. How can anyone state that there were no gentlemen in a corps that numbered Colonel Geo. H. Torney, gruff but kindly General Woodhull, Major Kendall, Major Shaw, Major Ireland, and the late Major W. R. Hall among its members?

There is, however, a strong sentiment among ex-army nurses that the Medical Department is a little unreasonable in demanding the flower of the profession in exchange for its own offers in return.

The government has been sufficiently liberal in the matter of quar-

ters, travelling allowances, etc., but the hated army ration, like the poor, bids fair to be with us always.

When the Army reorganization bill with its provision for a permanent Army Nurse Corps was passed in 1901, it was with a bitter sense of disappointment that we noted that no change had been made upon the (to us) vital point of subsistence. We had by our two and a half years of service proved to the Medical Department that the trained nurse was a necessary adjunct to the military hospital, but we had failed to impress it with the fact that we were deserving of a better class of maintenance than that accorded to the teamster and the enlisted man.

I am not discussing the ration from the viewpoint of its desirability as food for women of the class from which our best training-schools are recruited, but entirely in its relation to the dignity of the nursing profession.

While chief nurse of a small military hospital in Northern Luzon, I had occasion to fight many a battle royal with the commissary officer in regard to our allowances and commissary privileges. One day he exclaimed somewhat irritably: "Well, it is hard to class nurses properly, for you know the only other persons to whom rations are issued are enlisted men and teamsters!" Now, teamsters, or in other words *mule drivers*, are about the toughest element in the entire service, and of course it was anything but gratifying to hear myself and my companions ranked with them.

This seems to be the sentiment of the army as a whole, although many are too polite to express it, for there is a big social difference between he or she who draws rations and he who pays his own mess bills. A very disagreeable feeling was created during the meeting of the Spanish War Nurses in Washington in December, 1902, by the action of the Army Medical Department in connection with the Navy Nurse Corps bill, which had already been introduced in the Senate by Mr. Gallinger of New Hampshire. The Army objected so seriously to this bill because of the superior allowances, pay and (above all) *position* that it accorded the Navy nurse that it actually had to be withdrawn from the Committee on Naval Affairs and revised to make it more uniform with the Army Nurse Corps. Needless to say that in the process it was shorn of most of its advantages.

We felt that the bill should have been allowed to stand as first drawn, and if it successfully passed both houses of Congress the army could then have secured legislation which would enable it to bring its own nurse corps up to the same standard.

In view of the above you may be surprised to hear that for the last two years my name has been enrolled on the list of eligible volunteers.

In my letter to-day I am simply trying to help solve the problem of why the ex-army nurses do not respond, by giving to the JOURNAL a few of the reasons known to me; and although perfectly in accord with them in regard to the objectionable features of army nursing, I personally feel that should my country ever again need my services I will cheerfully give them even under the old conditions.

With the present ever-increasing prospect of something much more serious than the dawn "Coming up like thunder out of China 'cross the bay," surely the nurses of this country are not going to leave the medical department with a list of fifty names from which to draw its volunteer staff.

No matter what may be our views in regard to the conditions imposed by army service, who of us who have served under the Stars and Stripes in Cuba, Porto Rico, China, the Philippines, and in the camps of the United States will fail to respond to the celebrated toast of Admiral Decatur:

"Our country! * * * May she always be right; but *right or wrong*, our country."

ESTHER V. HASSON,
Ex-Army and Spanish War Nurse.

TO THE EDITOR: It is true that state registration for nurses is one of the longest steps yet taken towards establishing the profession of nursing on its proper basis in the eyes of the world; that is to say, ranking it among those professions the members of which are honorably and legally recognized, and cannot be competed with by any who have not carried out the prescribed length of study required for making them members of such professions.

It is true that nurses are working hard all over the world to gain recognition as a body by the state, and to impress on it the necessity that it should grant them its protection; and in a measure they have accomplished their object. Many lawyers and some doctors are interested in the effort, and coöperate in it; but outside of these, who is there of the general public who knows of the effort that is being made? The world in general does not know what nurses are trying to obtain, and because of its ignorance is not lending its interest. Why is it that more of what is being done or written is not published in the daily newspapers, as well as in the nursing periodicals, so that the public can